

Historical Review

The Constitution, a product of the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, established the U.S. government as it exists today. The purpose of the Constitutional Convention was to respond to a need for a stronger, more centralized government than what was laid forth in the Articles of Confederation.

After four months of debates and compromises, the members of the Constitutional Convention signed the document on September 17, 1787. The final draft of the Constitution was eventually ratified in all states, and the new Federal government came into existence in 1789. Two years later the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments, was added to the Constitution. Since then, seventeen additional amendments have been added.

Kentucky, originally part of Virginia, became the 15th state to join the Union upon ratification of the Constitution in 1792. We are one of only four states known as a Commonwealth, and one of only five states that hold elections in odd years. Currently we send two Senators and six Representatives to the national Congress, and our state government follows the bicameral model of that body, with 38 serving Senators and 100 Representatives.

Constitutional Facts

- Articles of Confederation: The rules of governance established by the thirteen original states after declaring freedom from Great Britain. The Articles failed due to the lack of power they afforded to the Central government, leaving it unable to remedy the nations problems.
- Framers: The delegates to the Constitutional Convention who wrote the Constitution in 1787.
- *The Federalist Papers*: A compilation of essays authored by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison and published to support ratification of the Constitution
- Preamble: The sentence at the beginning of the Constitution which states its purpose.

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

- Articles of the Constitution: The Constitution consists of seven articles which outline the legislative branch, the presidency (executive branch), the judicial branch, the states, the amendment process, the legal status of the Constitution, and the process of ratification.
- Bill of Rights (in summary):
 1. Religion, Free Speech, Press, Assembly, Petition
 2. Right to Bear Arms
 3. No Forced Quartering of Troops During Peacetime
 4. Search and Seizure
 5. Grand Jury, Double Jeopardy, Self-Incrimination, Due Process
 6. Criminal Prosecutions - Jury Trial, Right to Confront and to Counsel
 7. Common Law Suits - Jury Trial
 8. Excess Bail or Fines, Cruel and Unusual Punishment
 9. Non-Enumerated Rights
 10. Rights Reserved to States

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- Subsequent amendments to the Constitution:
 11. Suits Against a State (1795)
 12. Election of President and Vice-President (1804)
 13. Abolition of Slavery (1865)
 14. Privileges and Immunities, Due Process, Equal Protection, Apportionment of Representatives, Civil War Disqualification and Debt (1868)
 15. Rights Not to Be Denied on Account of Race (1870)
 16. Income Tax (1913)
 17. Election of Senators (1913)
 18. Prohibition (1919)
 19. Women's Right to Vote (1920)
 20. Presidential Term and Succession (1933)
 21. Repeal of Prohibition (1933)
 22. Two Term Limit on President (1951)
 23. Presidential Vote in D.C. (1961)
 24. Poll Tax (1964)
 25. Presidential Succession (1967)
 26. Right to Vote at Age 18 (1971)
 27. Compensation of Members of Congress (1992)

Voting

Voting is the single most important civic duty of a responsible American. Nevertheless, our nation's youth are choosing to participate in alarmingly low rates. Share the following statistics when you talk with your kids and hopefully you can startle a few individuals into action!

- Only 55% of Americans can correctly identify the three branches of government (ABA Civics Education Poll, 2005)
- Less than 50% of Americans between ages 15-26 think that communicating with elected officials, volunteering, and donating money to help others are qualities of good citizenship (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003)
- Fewer than 45% of 18-25 year olds voted in the last Presidential election (Government Election Statistics)
- Although there have been improvements since the 1998 study, a 2006 study by National Center for Education statistics shows that only 24% of 4th graders, 22% of 8th graders, and 27% of 12th graders reach a proficient level of civic education (2006 NAEP Civics assessment)
- 74 million people cast votes for the finale of the 2007 edition of American Idol. President Bush received only 62 million votes in the 2004 Presidential election

If your children are too young to vote encourage them to participate in a mock election through their school or community group. Two great programs are listed below:

- University of Virginia Youth Leadership Institute – YLI runs a nationwide mock election that school groups or administrators can register for via their website at www.youthleadership.net
- Kids Voting USA – KVUSA runs an exceptional nationally based election geared towards K-12 students. They provide materials and support to local schools and community leaders through their individual state organizations. Visit their website for more information. www.kidsvotingusa.org

You can also consult Kentucky's newly created voting website at _____. The website serves as a centralized and comprehensive resource that provides information concerning registration, precinct locations, voting timelines, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Recommended Discussion Topics

The most important points of government and citizenship can sometimes seem like the simplest. You can teach these topics yourself, or you can also go to the public library and search for some of the books listed below to help your child better understand the government and voting process.

Citizenship	Holding a Public Office
Community and Civic Involvement	Immigration
Compromise	Issues Facing Young People
Decision-Making	Rights and Responsibilities
Democracy	Voting and Elections
Freedom	What it means to be an American

Suggested Reading List

The depth of your discussion will depend on the age of your child. For younger ages, you may want to consider reading and discussing a book about the Constitution or U.S. government. Many such books can be found in your local public library. Several recommended texts for children are listed below:

Elementary

<i>Marshall, The Courthouse Mouse</i>	Peter and Cheryl Barnes
<i>House Mouse, Senate Mouse</i>	Peter and Cheryl Barnes
<i>Vote!</i>	Eileen Christelow
<i>Shh! We're Writing the Constitution</i>	Jean Fritz
<i>A Kids' Guide to America's Bill of Rights</i>	Kathleen Krull
<i>If You were There When They Signed the Constitution</i>	Elizabeth Levy
<i>A More Perfect Union: The Story of our Constitution</i>	Betsy and Giulio Maestro
<i>Election Day</i>	Margaret McNamara
<i>The Bill of Rights</i>	Patricia Ryon Quiri
<i>The Constitution</i>	Patricia Ryon Quiri

Middle

<i>Birth of the Constitution</i>	Edmund Lindop
<i>A Young People's History of the United States</i>	Howard Zinn
<i>Painless American History</i>	Curt Lader
<i>Citizenship</i>	Jay Schleifer
<i>Think About Our Rights: Civil Liberties & the United States</i>	Reginald Wilson

High School

<i>1984</i>	George Orwell
<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	Harriet Beecher Stowe
<i>Rise to Rebellion</i>	Jeff Shaara
<i>April Morning</i>	Howard Fast
<i>Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community & War</i>	Nathaniel Philbrick
<i>1776</i>	David McCullough

Additional Resources on the Web

National Conference of State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/backsch.htm>

Constitution Day, Inc.

www.constitutionday.com/

National Constitution Center

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitutionday/display/MainS/Home>

The Founders' Constitution: University of Chicago Press

<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>

Interactive Constitution: National Constitution Center

<http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/>

University of Virginia Youth Leadership Institute

www.youthleadership.net

KET EncycloMedia

<http://www.ket.org/education/encyclomedia.htm>